

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND TOURISM AWARENESS: A CASE OF HOMABAY
COUNTY, KENYA**

**BY
ROSE ACHIENG' AGALO**

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the Student

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other university or institution for academic credit.

Rose Achieng' Agalo:..... Date:

IC/PGC/1004/12

Declaration by the Supervisors

This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

Dr. Fredrick Ogenga:..... Date:

School of Information Communication and Media studies

Department of Communication, Media and Journalism

Rongo University, Kenya

Prof. Florence Odera:..... Date:

School of Education

Department of Curriculum Instruction and Media

Rongo University.

DEDICATION

To my children Sam and Joy, for the love and joy you fill me with, you remain my constant motivation to achieve greater heights, lots of love.

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ABSTRACT

Kenya's Vision 2030 Economic Pillar, identifies tourism as one of the key six sectors in contributing to the 10% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate per annum as from 2012. It is a major source of foreign exchange for the Country and plays a major role in employment in the private sector. This research aimed at exploring ways through which social media can enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination. This is as a result of curiosity of existing information flow to potential tourists in Homabay County. Regardless of Kenya's unique existence of tourist attractions spread throughout the Country, tourism activities in the Country have always been almost exclusively centered on two geographical regions: the coastal beaches and a handful of game reserves and national parks. This research therefore anticipated to enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination through the use of social media which has a worldwide audience. The study was, guided by the following research objectives: To identify the social media platforms used in creating tourism awareness for Homabay County. To investigate how tourism destinations can exploit social media strategies in creating tourism awareness and to examine the salience of user generated content in influencing tourists' decision-making behavior. The research employed mixed research design to establish how social media can be used to enhance the visibility of tourism in the County. Theoretical conceptualization was based on psychological ownership theory and perceived control which elaborated concepts for understanding travelers' behavior and the use of user generated content by travelers. The study targeted tourism stakeholders in Homabay County and used questionnaires and interview schedules as data collection instruments. Thematic analysis was used by the researcher to analyse data from emerging themes and subthemes guided by the research questions. Analysis of data showed that tourism and hospitality service providers in Homabay County have not fully embraced the use of social media hence missing on opportunities presented by social media to enhance their visibility. The researcher therefore recommended ways in which social media potential could be realised, adoption of social media strategies and development of policies by the County government to ensure a conducive operating environment for tourism.

OPERATION DEFINITION OF TERMS

Social media: A collection of web-based communication channels that enables people to interact with each other through content sharing, interaction, community-based input and collaboration.

Tourism: Travelling for pleasure or business; it is also the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, as well as the business of operating tours. Tourism may be international, or domestic

User generated content: Data generated through all online interactions by unpaid contributor(s) and is publicly available. It includes content such as discussion form posts, video, blogs, digital images, audio files, and other forms of media

Tourist: Someone who is makes a visit to a main destination outside his/her usual environment for less than a year for any main purpose [including] holidays, leisure and recreation, business, health, education or other purposes.

Tourism industry: These are sectors of the economy that provide products/ services consumed by visitors.

Tourism destination: These are sites that are promoted as places to visit and have some form of management process in place for visitor related purposes.

Tourism product: A group of components or elements brought together to satisfy tourist's leisure, pleasure or business needs at places other than their own normal place of residence. It includes tourist attractions, transport, accommodation, entertainment and services rendered which result in customer satisfaction

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACCRONYMS

KTB	Kenya Tourism Board
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Services
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
UGC	User Generated Content
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
F.A.Qs	Frequently asked questions
NGO'S	Non-governmental organization
ROI	Return on investment
WOM	Word of mouth
eWOM	Electronic Word of mouth

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter presents an overall introduction on social media and tourism awareness, a case study of Homabay County. It consists of the background of the study, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research objectives, and the research questions. It also contains the significance of the study, assumptions of the study and Scope and limitations of the study.

1.2 Background to the Study

From the dawn of time, people have traveled for leisure, business, and religious purposes. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) states that “tourism comprises of activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to an activity remunerated from within the place visited.

The 2017 United Nations report, states that the global outlook for the Travel & Tourism sector will remain robust and will continue to be at the forefront of wealth and employment creation in the global economy. Regardless of continually being faced with unpredictable shocks from terrorism, political instability, health pandemic, natural disasters, ethnic, cultural and religious differences, tourism has remained resilient, contributing to 3.1% direct GDP growth and 6 million net additional jobs in 2016. Direct Travel & Tourism GDP growth recorded a stronger growth in 2016, than financial and business services, manufacturing, public services, retail and distribution, and transport sectors. (IPK International, 2016).

New destinations continue to emerge across the globe while existing ones are rebranding and introducing new products in order to keep up with the current trends and needs of tourists. To create awareness worldwide about their products and services, destinations are putting in place strategies, reshaping the way they offer services to their clients, exploring and using various means of communication technology to keep abreast in the competitive industry. Of importance to this research, is the use of social media which is a form of new media. Social media

plays a significant communication role in many aspects of tourism. It is fast becoming a necessary part of communication arsenal for tourism businesses and destinations and is particularly useful in information search, decision-making behaviors, tourism promotion and in focusing on best practices for interacting with prospective customers.

In Africa, social media penetration stands at 24% with a mobile penetration of 67% and internet penetration of 26.5% against a population of approximately 1.1 billion people and a total continental GDP of \$2.39 trillion. (O'Toole, 2016). Research has shown that Social media rankings in Africa does not have a direct correlation to a flourishing tourism sector. Tourism being a very sensitive industry is affected by geography, social, economic and political factors that are complex and have a direct effect on tourism making social media a distant variable.

The construction of the Kenya -Uganda Railway in 1896 led to the foundations of modern tourism in Kenya. (Akama 2010). As the economic importance of tourism grew the government established the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in 1966 mandated with the overall formulation and implementation of the Country's tourism policy. During the colonial rule, a number of hotels and lodges were built by resident European developers. Most of the hospitality facilities were built in Nairobi, which became the hub of commerce, business and administration in the East Africa region (Bosire, 1995). In 1948, the East Africa Travel and Tourism Association (EATTA) was formed to promote and market tourism by the colonial government in collaboration with conservation organizations (Ouma, 1982). In 1950s, tourism increased as a result of new tourism policies aimed at shifting from wildlife hunting which was a preserve for the rich and affluent to wildlife viewing and photography and beach tourism. This encouraged more international tourists to visit Kenya since it was within the financial reach of most middle – class people.

After attainment of independence in 1963, the prices of agricultural products in the world market fell drastically and sometimes absolutely relative to manufactured goods (Migot-Adholla, 1984). This affected the country's economy as coffee and tea production brought in foreign exchange. The government therefore resorted to tourism as an alternative source of foreign exchange. This led to the establishment of the Kenya Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) in

1965 to be in charge of tourism investment initiatives, and to monitor the establishment and operation of tourism and hospitality facilities (Dieke, 1991). As the economic importance of tourism grew the government further established the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in 1966 mandated with the overall formulation and implementation of the Country's tourism policy. The Ministry oversaw the shift of tourism development from small-scale public and private enterprise to the establishment of large-scale tourism projects which were mainly financed by external multinational investors. However, a distinctive feature of foreign tourism capital investment in Kenya were spatially concentrated mainly in Mombasa, Nairobi and in the popular wildlife parks and reserves, such as Maasai Mara, Amboseli and Tsavo. Focus was on international tourism since it was considered as a means of earning the Country foreign exchange(Akama, 2010).

Reduction of the tourism product quality led to the decline of tourism in the 1990's. This arose due to rapid development of unplanned and mushrooming of tourism and hospitality facilities in certain locations perceived to have high potential for quick profit returns. This coupled with political instability and insecurity in the Country led to issuing of travel advisory warnings by Kenya's tourism source markets cautioning their residents from visiting Kenya. This set of new challenges and problems causing a downward trend to the industry prompted the Kenyan government to establish, the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) in 1996 to market and promote Kenya as a tourist destination both locally and internationally. This laid the foundations of domestic tourism in the Country. (KTB, 2017)

Kenya Vision 2030 is the country's development blueprint that covers the period from 2008 to 2030. Its main goal is to transform Kenya into an industrializing, middle-income country that provides a high-quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030. Vision 2030 is based on three pillars. The economic pillar, the political pillar and the social pillar. The economic pillar has identified tourism as one of the six key sectors based on its ability to contribute to the 10% GDP growth per annum. Its objective is to improve the prosperity of Kenyan citizens through an economic development programme, that covers all the Counties in Kenya. Tourism is also the second major foreign exchange earner (*Kenya Vision 2030*,)

The emergence of social media and its adoption by tourism service providers has been envisioned as a means of reaching new audiences and a way of improving Kenya as tourist destination by showcasing emerging destinations within the Country, improved and new tourism products.

Destination Kenya is a combination of all the tourism circuits all of which have unique attractions. The tourism circuits include; Nairobi circuit, Central Kenya circuit, Coastline circuit, Eastern circuit, Southern circuit, North Rift circuit, South Rift circuit and the Western circuit.

Homabay County is located in the western Kenya tourism circuit. The western tourism circuit is one of the least known but the most unspoilt and uncrowded circuit. The attractions range from natural to cultural attractions. The circuit is also home to archeological and historical sites, freshwater bodies including L. Victoria which is the second largest fresh water lake in the world; caves, inland beaches, tropical rain forest, indigenous forest ecosystems, wetland ecosystems, mountains and hills, islands, waterfalls, museums, national parks and game reserves, nature conservancies, and diverse cultures, among others.

1.3 Tourism in Homabay County

Homabay County is located in the western Kenya tourism circuit. The western tourism circuit is one of the least known but the most unspoilt and uncrowded circuit. The attractions range from natural to cultural attractions. The circuit is also home to archeological and historical sites, freshwater bodies including L. Victoria which is the second largest fresh water lake in the world; caves, inland beaches, tropical rain forest, indigenous forest ecosystems, wetland ecosystems, mountains and hills, islands, waterfalls, museums, national parks and game reserves, nature conservancies, and diverse cultures, among others.

Tourism activities in the Country are majorly concentrated in the coastal region and a handful of game reserves offering sun and sand and safari. With so much emphasis on the two circuits, other destinations have been overlooked. Homabay is such a destination. It is endowed with a number of attractions which make it viable to be a tourism destination. Other than attractions, it also has a conducive weather and a good number of accommodation and amenities that are traveler friendly.

Located in Lambwe Valley, close to the shores of Lake Victoria, Ruma National Park is home to the endangered roan antelope. The park has a flourishing wildlife and exceptional birdlife. The park is also the only protected area in Kenya where the globally threatened blue swallow bird, a scarce intra-African migrant, is regularly recorded. It covers an area of 120 sq km. (Ruma National Park, 2016). Lake Simbi Nyaima is a volcanic lake that was formed as a result of an earthquake that was accompanied by volcanic eruption around 1680. It is located in Kendu Bay. The lake has occasional visits by flamingoes and the water of the lake is said to have medicinal value and many people claim to have been cured after bathing in the lake (Kenyaplex, 2017). Kanjera Archaeological Site is a popular attraction for lovers of ancient history and archaeology. Stone tools and fossils dating to around 2.5 million years have been excavated in Kanjera which is located on the southern shore of the Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria.

Rusinga and Mfangano Islands are both set in Lake Victoria and have breathtaking white beaches good for sun and sand. The beaches offer excellent sites for hiking, fishing, walking safaris, bird watching and exceptional tranquility needed for a rest (About Homa Bay County, 2017). Located in Mbita, Rusinga island, Tom Mboya mausoleum was established in honor of Tom Mboya who was a politician and powerful minister during his regime and was assassinated in Nairobi, 1969. The mausoleum has been built upon his tomb with a bullet shape to symbolize how he met his death as he was gunned down by an assassinator.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Homabay County is endowed with a number of unexploited tourist attractions making it a viable tourist destination. The attractions range from beaches, flora and fauna, cultural tourism and water-based activities. Despite of the increasing importance of tourism, Homabay County has attracted relatively little attention from a literature perspective. The available literature is either sector specific, relatively narrow or simply different. Few studies that have been conducted on Homabay County rarely appears in the contemporary tourism literature. Similarly, due to limited publicity through media and government bodies responsible for promoting tourist attractions, the County remains less known as a tourist destination. This decreases its visibility, making it less visible on online platforms. As highlighted in (KNBS, 2015) report, western tourist circuit had the lowest

visitation rates of 3.39% to 4.77% from 2010-2014. With the world becoming a global village through constant technological advances, potential tourists both domestic and international mostly rely on online media to get information regarding destination(s) of their interest. This information is generated by the destination stakeholders, government and other travelers who have had the opportunity to visit the destination. Inadequate or lack of publicity leads to underdevelopment of a tourist destination. Homabay County has a poverty index of 44.1 % and a population density of 427.2. (County Statistical Abstract 2015 - KNBS) The main economic activities include fishing due to proximity of Lake Victoria, small scale mixed farming and commercial businesses. By incorporating tourism as an economic activity, the County stands to reap economic benefits of tourism such as employment opportunities, infrastructure development, tax revenues and income as well as enhance the entrepreneurial and skills levels of local residents. These direct developments occur within the primary tourism sectors including lodging, restaurants, transportation, entertainment, and retail trade. This study brings out the intrinsic factors that have in one way or the other hindered the competitiveness of Homabay County as a tourist destination yet it is endowed by many attractions. It also seeks to create tourism awareness through the use of Social media.

1.5 Purpose of the study

To investigate Social media and tourism awareness in Homabay County.

1.6 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study include:

- i. To identify the social media platforms used in creating tourism awareness for Homabay County
- ii. To establish how tourism destinations can exploit social media strategies in creating tourism awareness
- iii. To examine the salience of user generated content (UGC) in influencing tourists decision making behavior.

1.7 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. How do tourism destinations use social media platforms to create tourism awareness?
- ii. How can tourism destinations efficiently use social media strategies to create tourism awareness?
- iii. How does user generated content (UGC) influence tourists decision making behavior in deciding where to visit?

1.8 Significance of the study

Development of tourism in Homabay County will lead to an increase in revenue collection through the issue of licenses, permits and collection of levy. An increase of inbound tourists visiting tourism destinations in Homabay County as a result of awareness created on various social media platforms will increase international tourism receipts in Kenya. Tourism is a major source of foreign exchange in the Country. Thus, an increase in international tourism receipts leads to an increase in foreign exchange reserves. This enables the Country to carry out international trade successfully with other Countries as well as stabilizing its balance of payments ensuring a stable economy. Other than inbound tourists, there will be an increase of domestic tourists also as a result of awareness created on social media platforms. The national government is set to benefit from taxes paid by the tourists and tourism businesses in the form of park fees chargeable to the tourists and license fees paid by various tourism businesses and enterprises. This will result in development of tourism infrastructure in Homabay County by the national government. It will also open up Homabay County to investors. Tourism requires good infrastructure, social amenities, efficient modes of transport, and communication and a secure environment.

Homabay County Government is mandated with creating effective policies that promote the County's tourism industry, creating a conducive environment for tourism businesses to operate in and to lobby investors to invest in capital projects designed to attract tourists and green investments in the tourism industry that promote sustainable tourism. Through the use of social media, the Ministry of tourism, Homabay County Government will be able to showcase the entire tourist attractions of Homabay County as well as elaborate policies that guide tourism within the County while giving current updates of tourism activities happenings in the County.

The study will be of significance to the local community. The first Millennium development goal (MDG) advocates for poverty eradication. The travel and tourism industry plays a major role in poverty eradication through job creation and other economic opportunities. Tourism is a labor-intensive industry compared to other industries. It has low barriers to entry and usually includes a wide range of enterprises that provide development opportunities to the local community economy. Its workforce majorly comprises of high ratios of youth and female hence promoting women empowerment and youth employment. This is in line with the third MDG goal which emphasizes on the need to empower women. This study therefore establishes that by enhancing tourism in Homabay, the endeavor will generate employment to the local people of Homabay County and the citizens of Kenya at large.

Social media gives tourism destinations a platform for creating awareness on their products and services. It also presents various avenues for destinations stakeholders to grow their market share and build relationships with their consumers.

This study argues for the incorporation of social media into the daily media communication routine of stakeholders in the tourism industry in Homabay County. Constant online interaction between a brand and its prospects boosts social media visibility of a brand. Similarly, the study emphasized on the integration of social media strategies in communication operations of tourism stakeholders as a means of enabling them derive value from social media.

Destinations will be able to create awareness on various social media platforms about their products, services and various attractions. This will raise the number of domestic, inbound and outbound tourists visiting various tourist attractions and hospitality facilities in Homabay County. Additionally, tourism entrepreneurs in Homabay County will gain economically from tourism development through sales and marketing on various social media platforms which have a global audience.

Finally, the study forms a useful foundation upon which future studies could be undertaken by other researchers researching on tourism in Homabay County. Findings of the study will also provide useful literature for other scholars who may wish to further explore the role of social media in creating touristic awareness in other areas.

1.9 Justification of the study

Literature review has revealed limited research in the area of social media and tourism awareness in Kenya particularly in Homabay County as a tourism destination. Literature review in the Kenyan tourism industry has mainly been done on two geographical regions: the coastal beaches and a handful of game reserves and national parks. However, a number of tourism destinations across the Country are coming up. The rise of domestic tourism in Kenya is giving a major boost to remote destinations that are opening up for tourism.

Social media is a new phenomenon globally, however, the increasing use of social media platforms by travelers leaves little option for tourism stakeholders in Homabay County for not using social media platforms. Social media has become a popular platform for creating tourism awareness across the globe. Surprisingly, the power of social media networks as a tool for creating tourism awareness is yet to be fully harnessed despite the abundance of opportunities presented by social media.

Homabay County as a tourist destination is endowed with tourist attractions. Limited research on Homabay County as a tourist destination is the basis of this research. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the use of social media in creating awareness in Homabay County.

1.10 Assumptions of the study

The tourism industry plays an important role in the socio-economic sector of Country as well as Homabay County as a tourist destination. To achieve this, the use of Social media can be used to promote tourism awareness in Homabay County thus increasing tourists' arrivals. As technology advances, future trends on modern communication will be based on social media platforms. The selected sample size for the study was appropriate and gave beneficial information required for the research. Respondents who participated in the study answered the interviews and questioners in an honest and candid manner.

1.11 Scope and limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in Homa Bay County. It is one of the 47 counties in Kenya established after the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010. The County

covers an area of 4,267.1 Km inclusive of the water surface which covers an area of 1,227 km (*First County Integrated Development Plan 2013-2017*, 2016).

As a tourist destination, the County has tourist attractions, hospitality providers, as well as other facilities and infrastructure that support tourism. It was however limited to stakeholders in the tourism industry within Homabay County as other facilities and infrastructure that support tourism. The study sought to investigate tourism awareness in Homabay County. The study was conducted in 2016 and 2017.

It was however limited to stakeholders in the tourism industry within Homabay County such as the tourists, the local community, hotel employees, tour companies, the County government, Kenya Wildlife Service personnel in Ruma national park. The study was also limited to the use of social media in enhancing tourism awareness in Homabay County.

1.12 Summary

This chapter has covered an overview of this chapter, the background of the study, social media and tourism awareness globally, the tourism industry in Kenya, and Homabay County's tourism industry. It has also covered the problem statement, purpose of the study, research objectives, and the research questions, significance of the study, assumptions of the study, Scope and limitations of the Study and ends in a summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the existing relevant theoretical and empirical literature to the study. The main goal was to identify existing gaps of knowledge that the study sought to fill. To do this, the chapter was divided into sub sections. The first section looks at the conceptual framework and how the underlying concepts of this study relate to each other. Secondly, the theoretical framework elaborates the fundamental theory that forms the basis of this research. Thirdly, this chapter sought to find out how social media contributes to tourism awareness. The chapter also examined the overview of social media and tourism awareness globally, in Africa and Kenya. Finally, the chapter reviewed the concepts that form underlying concepts of this research. All this literature, informed the research on social media and tourism awareness.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research relied on Psychological Ownership Theory. It elaborates concepts for understanding travelers' behavior. Travelers who are satisfied or dissatisfied with a destination products and service tend to share their experiences with people close to them. Therefore, satisfied travelers are likely to develop complex and exclusive highly committed relationships with tourism businesses that other competitors are virtually excluded from the consideration set and a consumer buys virtually exclusively from a particular brand.

Destination executives need to recognize that lasting customer relationships are a key component in successful long-term business operations (Nozar, 1999). This is vital for destination practitioners because loyal customers appear to be willing to purchase more, pay higher prices, and offer positive word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations to others (Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000; Reichheld & Kenny, 1990).

(Crotts, 1999; Perdue 1993), observed that referrals from family and friends is mostly frequently obtained and influential source of information used by tourists in

their travel decision making. Advances in technology has led to emergence of social media

platforms where travelers not only access information from family and friends but from a worldwide audience. These platforms enable travelers to search and review destinations they would like to visit. Trip advisor is currently the world's largest travel site, with 435 million reviews and opinions covering 6.8 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions, and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features reaching 390 million average monthly unique visitors. (Fact Sheet - TripAdvisor, 2017)

Traveler-to-traveler communication using electronic word- of- mouth (eWOM) on social media platforms is the basis of user generated content and it has a strong influence on travelers buying decision process of goods and services. (Fernando 2007) suggests that UGC is the polar opposite of traditional forms of media marketing since content is generated by the consumer rather than by the marketer.

Electronic word of mouth communication plays an important role in shaping consumers attitudes and behavior pertaining a particular destination. A number of researchers have suggested that favorable eWOM leads to product success and is an efficient way of attracting and maintaining customers thus creating consumer loyalty base for a destination

eWOM usually takes place before, during and after the trip. It is viewed as an independent source of information since travelers are not paid by destinations to advertise on their behalf hence viewed as a credible source of information by potential tourists Through this, potential travelers are able to form independent perceptions about a destination when searching for a destination to visit.

eWOM is vital for travelers due to the intangibility nature of tourism products. They cannot be evaluated prior to purchase, (Lewis and Chambers, 2000) and are perceived as being highly risky. (Guseman and George,1981). Potential travelers are likely to engage in eWOM conversations with the aim of gathering more information on sought after tourism products that reduces the risk and enables them to understand the service prior to consumption. (Bristor, 1990). Potential travelers therefore make enquiries before purchasing tourism products and consumers find user generated content from social media platforms as a useful strategy in reducing

most types of risk. Consequently, potential travelers rely on the opinions of other consumers when forming expectations and evaluate them based on the opinions.

(Asatryan and Oh, 2008) applied Psychological ownership theory to explain why former guests are motivated to offer eWOM feedback. Intimate knowledge about a destination may result in excitement about the target of ownership and evoke the customer's desire to share his or her experiences with colleagues, relatives, and friends. (Dichter, 1966) suggested that product involvement results in WOM. The desire to be associated with a particular brand or lifestyle and the significance of the PO object are likely to generate an excitement and willingness to share information about that object.

Consumers who are satisfied with a brand tend to become loyal customers and most likely post positive reviews on social platforms manifesting a sense of ownership. However, the motive to post positive or negative reviews maybe a desire to control or influence a destination indirectly by communicating with its future potential customers. (Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel, 2012)

2.3 Social media platforms and tourism awareness

Social media, is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61). It is greatly changing business-to-business communication, business- to- customer communication and customer-to-customer communication Further, (Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel, 2012) elaborates that social media is fundamentally changing ways in which tourist's search, find, read and trust as well as collaboratively produce information about tourism destinations and stake holders.

Tourism is an 'information intensive industry' (Gretzel, Yuan, & Fesenmaier, 2000 Pg.147). Developments in technological advances has seen the emergence of social media. It is a platform that has changed dissemination of information to travelers. It allows individuals to easily contribute their opinions, thoughts and creations (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013) and relies more on user generated content (UGC) which travelers consider as more credible and authentic.

As social media advances, travelers engage in it to satisfy any need, from functional, social, hedonic to psychological. It is therefore logical that tourism destinations must be prepared to engage tourists. (Ling 2010, Para-Lopez et al 2010). They ought to meet their travelers' needs by providing value added information on their social networking platforms to differentiate themselves from competitors.

The power of the tourism product is more than ever consumer-driven. Consumers demand what they want from tourism destinations: their expectations are higher and subsequently they are much more difficult to impress (Buhalis Law, 2008). Advanced communication technologies enable tourism destinations to be efficient, flexible and collaborate more (Lange-Faria& Elliot 2012)

Social media has 2.3 billion active users. Currently, Facebook leads with 1.71 billion users, YouTube 1 billion users, WhatsApp 900 million users, and Instagram with 400 million users. (Smith, 2016). Trip advisor, a common travel site has 6.6 million businesses and properties in 135,000 destinations, and 255 new contributions are posted every minute. (Fact Sheet, 2016). These statistics proves that social media is indeed dominating the tourism industry.

Mobile devices use by travelers is on the rise. This ranges from smart phones to tablets. These devices have enabled applications for sharing content, photos, videos and blogging that make social networking easier for travelers. An estimated 40% of smart phone users obtain destination related information with these devices (IPK International, 2017). This enables travelers to document their travel experience process.

Social networking depends very much on the concept of wordmouth (WOM) or in this case, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) which: "...involves consumers' comments about products and services posted on the Internet ...the big difference between WOM and eWOM is that in eWOM, recommendations are typically from unknown individuals with whom strong ties are lacking, so 'online' consumers have difficulty in using source similarity to determine the credibility of information" (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011 pg 15). Furthermore, eWOM may in fact be even more influential than WOM given its characteristics of global reach, speed

with which it travels, ease of use, anonymity, and absent of direct face to face pressure. (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011)

When travelers begin to refer back to a destination and hold online conversations about it, they are establishing “social proof,”. A trust that extends throughout their network of family and friends. Based on (Ektron, 2016) ‘online social network users are three times more likely to trust their peers’ opinions over advertising when making purchase decisions and less than 20% trust advertising when it comes to making decisions. ‘Influencers, including friends, friends-of-friends, colleagues and recognized experts, exist everywhere on the social Web. They are the people within peer groups that others go to for recommendations, advice and trusted opinions. By engaging them, a destination harnesses the power of word-of-mouth marketing, resulting to expansion of their audience from them to their friends to their friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend. While it is impossible for a tourism destination to be on every social network, satisfied consumers will be ambassadors who will carry a destination brand messages, spread it to other social networks and defend the brand if necessary.

Apart from brand building, social proof should also be part of a tourism business search engine optimization strategy. Search engines are essential for tourism businesses because it increases a destination’s visibility through higher search engine rankings. It is also where customers find trusted, authority sites. Search engines like google, rank this sites high in search results. Social proof therefore is the foundation of word -of-mouth marketing online and offline. Destinations therefore need their consumers to take ownership of their brand message. (Xiang, Pang, Law & Fesemaier, 2010)

Social media presents a perfect opportunity for tourism destinations to listen to current customers, industry experts, prospects and other influencers and use the information to improve their destinations (Ektron, 2016)

When a destination begins to participate in online conversations, they need to speak to the overall market and take part with helpful, quality content so that their audience will share the experience they have with others online. Building consumer relationships enables a destination online presence to evolve positively and progressively.

A destination risks losing opportunities by ignoring the value social media presents. Whether the benefit is directly quantifiable or not. Currently, travelers communicate more on social media and spend much of their online time browsing different social networks. If a destination does not take an active front, competitors are bound to reach out to their target market. Gaining the public trust is critical to gaining business. (Ektron, 2016)

Research has shown that Social media rankings in Africa does not have a direct correlation to a flourishing tourism sector. Tourism being a very sensitive industry is affected by geography, social, economic and political factors that are complex and have a direct effect on tourism making social media a distant variable. Lesotho, a landlocked country is surrounded by south Africa. Its tourist visitors increased from 433,000 to 1,079,000 between 2013 and 2014. This is attributed to the interconnectedness with south Africa despite its social media ranking of 26 out of 51. Interestingly, it has been presented by several online travel platforms as beautiful, culturally rich, affordable, safe and easily accessible from Durban making it a vastly underrated tourism destination. (O'Toole, 2016) However south Africa, Egypt and Mauritius which are ranked top 5 by social media attest to the correlation between social media and tourism growth.

Facebook has still maintained its lead as the most popular social media platform in Africa with about 100 million users. 80% of these users access facebook using mobile devices. Majority of destinations are present on facebook. Egypt leads with 13million users making it the world's 20th largest user of facebook. South Africa is second with 5.5million Facebook users and Nigeria is third with 5.35million users. (O'Toole, 2016). However, other social media platforms do play niche roles in Africa's tourism industry. Twitter is the second popular social media platform after facebook. It is strongest in terms of speed and allows destinations to share current information instantly as well as enables real-time two-way dialogue between brands and consumers.

Social media platforms can be classified according to purpose and function .*Social networking*: It entails using websites and applications for informal communication. It allows users to connect and share with people who have similar interests, likes and backgrounds. These types of platforms allow you to share and consume

information across your network and to join, create, and participate in groups. Facebook is the most popular example of a social network website.as of December 2016; it had 1.23 billion daily active users. 1.15 billion of whom access the platform from a mobile device (Takaoka, 2017) Other include linkedin and google +

Microblogging: These platforms allow posting of very short entries or updates. It also allows users to subscribe to other users' content, send direct messages, and reply publicly. Similarly, users are able to create and share hashtags to share content about related subjects (DelValle Institute, 2017) Examples include twitter which has 140-character limit for each tweet and tumblr. Twitter has about 328 million monthly users (Zephoria, 2017)

Blogging: (DelValle Institute, 2017) defines blogging as recording opinions, stories, articles, and links to other websites on a personal website. (Takaoka, 2017) simply states that Blogs are written content or video content also referred to as vlogging that others can read, view, comment and share. Examples include Wordpress , Blogger and Live Journal.

PhotoSharing: It enables publishing a user's digital photos, enabling the user to share photos with others either publicly or privately (DelValle Institute, 2017) examples include Instagram which is owned by facebook and has 700 million monthly active users (Aslam, 2017) others include pinterest and flickr.

Video Sharing: It is an engaging form of social media content. It allows users to upload videos that can be shared specifically to that platform as well as all across the internet(Takaoka, 2017). With an enormous audience, Youtube has 1.3 billion users who watch almost 5 billion videos per day. They watch 900 million hours of video every single month. Interestingly, it also frequently surpasses Google as the number one search engine. Other examples of video sharing platforms include vimeo and vine.

Content curation: This are platforms dedicated to curating content. Examples include Wikis. Wikis are are collaborative platforms where users contribute articles to create sites that are full of vast information like Wikipedia and wikia . Others include pinterest and paper.li.

Messengers: This are apps that allow instant messaging using internet connection worldwide. Whatsapp is such a platform and has 1 billion users(Smith, 2017). It

can be used for instant messaging, voice calls, video calls, and sending pictures. *Bookmarking sites:* These sites allow users to save and organize links to any number of online resources and websites. A great feature of these services is the ability for the user to “tag” links, which makes them easier to search, and invariably, share with their followers. StumbleUpon is an example of a bookmarking site.

Social News: Essentially, this type of platform is used to share news or outside articles with a community or network. These platforms then allow users to vote on or rate the content, so that the highest rated (most popular) content is the easiest to see and find on the site. Examples include dig and reddit

Consumer review networks: These are online platforms that enable individuals to find, review, and share information about brands, products, and services, as well as restaurants, travel destinations, and more. Examples include yelp, zomato and trip advisor. TripAdvisor, is the world’s largest travel site. It has over 500 million reviews and opinions covering the world’s largest selection of travel listings worldwide, over 7 million accommodations, airlines, attractions, and restaurants – TripAdvisor provides travelers with the wisdom of the crowds to help them decide where to stay, how to fly, what to do and where to eat. TripAdvisor also compares prices from more than 200 hotel booking sites, enabling travellers find the lowest price for the hotel that’s right for them. ("Media Centre", 2017)11.

E-commerce: Last but not least, a big trend emerging across all types of social media is the ability to view and purchase desired goods with a click of a button. Sites such as OLX aggregate products from different retailers in a single online marketplace, and services. However, e-commerce elements are being adopted by many networks whose primary functionalities place them in different categories, such as Pinterest, Twitter, and Facebook.

The shift in communication from traditional media to Web 2.0 has changed the way tourism businesses interact with customers and the public at large. Social media is becoming an essential tool for destinations in creating touristic awareness and managing customer relations. As much as social media has made it easy for destinations to connect with customers, it also has certain drawbacks. Different from traditional communication channels and forms of marketing in which destinations would retain control of the messaging, there is no control on social

media. A number of social media platforms allows anyone and everyone to share their opinions about destinations which makes for interesting conversations but then again can be dangerous for the particular tourism destinations. Therefore, it is vital for destinations to find an appropriate way to use social media in order to make a return on investments.

Effective use of social by tourism destinations has various benefits which include: Increasing online presence of destinations. Social media platforms have large audiences. Facebook has 1.28 billion (Facebook, 2017), Twitter 100 million (Aslam, 2017) and Instagram 400 million (Aslam, 2017) daily active users. These are common social media platforms out of many others making social media platforms a promising audience for tourism destinations. Owing to the fact that it is free to create social media accounts since none of the largest platforms have any sign-up fees for a destination to open accounts. It makes social media a cheaper option for enhancing visibility unlike traditional advertising. Social media encourages sharing of online content by customers. Driven by the use of user generated content that enables customers to share things with their networks from photos, videos, hot deals, interesting articles and comments. Followers of a destination can share with their followers who then share with their followers giving destinations a wider reach at a lower cost. This enables destinations engage potential guests.

In addition to building an online presence, social media increases brand loyalty and advocacy. Social media users engage on social platforms to satisfy their personal needs. Therefore, compelling and relevant content is what grabs the attention of potential customers while retaining the loyalty of consumers. It also facilitates two-way communication that allows building meaningful relationships with a destination's both current and potential customers. Social content indirectly boosts links to a destination's website leading to improved search rankings by appearing in universal search results, improving search engines traffic and online sales. Social media enables a destination to uncover valuable insights by gaining important information about its customers that will help it make smarter business decisions. Through conversations on social platforms, a destination is able to uncover conversations and answer questions about its offerings, find out what the public likes regarding its offerings, reaffirm what they already know and how to better

improve its products and services to better meet the needs of its target market. According to (Zeckman ,2017) over 50% of destinations utilizing social media for over a year are generating leads via social media through new channels that are shared by their consumers. In order to generate qualified leads through social media, a destinations audience has to trust it, be engaged and have a need for its offerings.

Certainly, social media also has its demerits. As quickly as users can share a destination's content on social platforms, they could also choose to share an unflattering story. Social media users have a free rein to post whatever they want. This means that satisfied customers are likely to post positive reviews while unhappy ones can leave angry rants. Similarly, employees of a destination can easily get caught up in social media and post whatever comes to mind. Propelled with social media ability to reach a big audience in a matter of minutes this could have dire consequences for a destination. Even though destinations are getting in social media to showcase their offerings, communicate with customers and get a return on investments, it gets difficult to quantify the return on investment and value of one channel over another. Presence on social media therefore calls for destinations to commit resources in terms of time and personnel to manage social networks, respond to feedback and produce new content.

Utilizing social media to create awareness of tourism products has proven to be an excellent strategy. Participating in social media allows destinations to start and engage conversations. Good conversational content is key for driving good conversations. Content that is posted by a brand on social media platforms stimulates conversations leading to users sharing on other social networks and create a dynamic and engaging environment.

2.4 Social Media Strategies for creating tourism awarness

Social media is a valuable tool for creating tourism awarness but one with potential consequences. Having online presence on multiple social media platforms without a clear strategic approach, poses a number of challenges making it difficult to effectively measure social media returns on investments .(Lardi & Fuchs, n.d.)A destination social media strategy will guide its actions and also act as a measure to determine whether its succeeding or failing in social media usage.

(Daoud, 2016) recommends a framework consisting of eight essential elements. These elements are fundamental for a social media marketing strategy. The first step is to identify a destination goal(s). It is important for a tourist destination to set goals giving a clear direction on way forward. Retaining customers, increasing brand awareness and reducing marketing costs are general goals that a destination should incorporate in its social media marketing strategy. Other goals can be customized according to the destination's mandate. Other than goals, a destination needs to set marketing objectives. Marketing objectives defines how a goal is successfully fulfilled. The objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable relevant and time bound. (SMART)

Creating a social team is key to achieving the overall communication goals of a destination. The social team consists of individuals in charge of a destination social media strategy. Each individual/ group, depending on the size of the destination ought to have a clear set of tasks. For example a person/group can be incharge of curating content, while another incharge of responding to negative feedback.

Customers are the core of tourism businesses. Tourism destinations ought to have the capacity to identifying their ideal customers on social networks and know their customers profile. This enables them to define and target the right people in the right social networks at the right times with the right message.

Researching competition also keeps a tourism business apprised of their competitors activity and enables them to comprehend what is working subsequently intergrating it to their business operations. Compiling a list of closest rivals, enables a tourism business to search social networks their competitors are using, and analyze their content strategy. Destinations should also pay close attention to their fan base, posting frequency and time of the day.

Daoud (2016) further states that destination and tourism businesses need to research social media platforms their prospects spend most of their time on. This enables them to categorize their primary and secondary social media platforms according to traffic and thus making returns.

According to experts, the key to a successful social media presence is rich content that targets an audience, delivers the right message to them and persuades them to take action. By definition, rich content is any form of content that engages the user

by deviating from normal text or static images (O'Toole, 2016). On social media platforms, content also includes podcasts, audio, videos, music, eBooks, webinars and flash animation, all of which offer more dynamic elements and a more nuanced user experience. These can also increase conversion rates, appeal to viewers who prefer video to text, and make consumers more confident about online purchase decisions. The three components to a successful social media strategy include the type of content, time of posting, and the frequency of posting.

(Kotler & Armstrong, 1991) also suggest the four 'Ps' namely price, product, place as core elements for a successful social media strategy. While (Nair 2011) states that destinations need to have a social media strategy to enable them rightfully position themselves in the market. The strategy focus should be on building internal competencies that leads to tourists acquisition or service.

Finally, having a social media team with each member assigned to roles, will increase productivity, avoid confusion and overlapping efforts. Similarly, a tourism business should allocate a budget for social media marketing by analyzing the specific tactics chosen to achieve goals and objectives.

2.5 User Generated Content (UGC) and tourism awareness

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, describes UGC as a creative work that is published on publicly accessible websites and is created without a direct link to monetary profit or commercial interest. It is considered as an electronic form of word- of- mouth marketing that has also been defined as the extent to which a customer informs friend, relatives, and colleagues of an event that has created a certain level of satisfaction. (Soderlund, 1998)

User generated content (UGC) is also a means by which people use social media to share their ideas and collaborate. Travelers perceive UGC as a credible source for travel information. UGC posted by travelers who have first-hand experience and can share it with family and friends who in turn can share with friends of friends. UGC also enables monitoring of visitor attitudes towards a destination through analyzing visitor stories concerning a product and also the use of media technology for communication, for example the use of mobile devices such as tablets and smart phones has also caught up with the social media trend. Such use of technology enables travelers to explore new travel opportunities, share photos and other social

activities at any time during the safari. This is supported by a wide range of applications available in mobile devices.

Opinions of other travelers are becoming influential in how potential travelers choose destinations to visit. (Greztel&Yoo. 2008; Oconcur , 2008). Generally, travelers tend to search and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision making process in order to minimize the risk of making a poor destination decision. Consumers use different online platforms that serves their travel need as sources of information depending on the stage they are in the travel planning process – the pre-trip, during the trip and post-trip.(Choi et al., 2007)

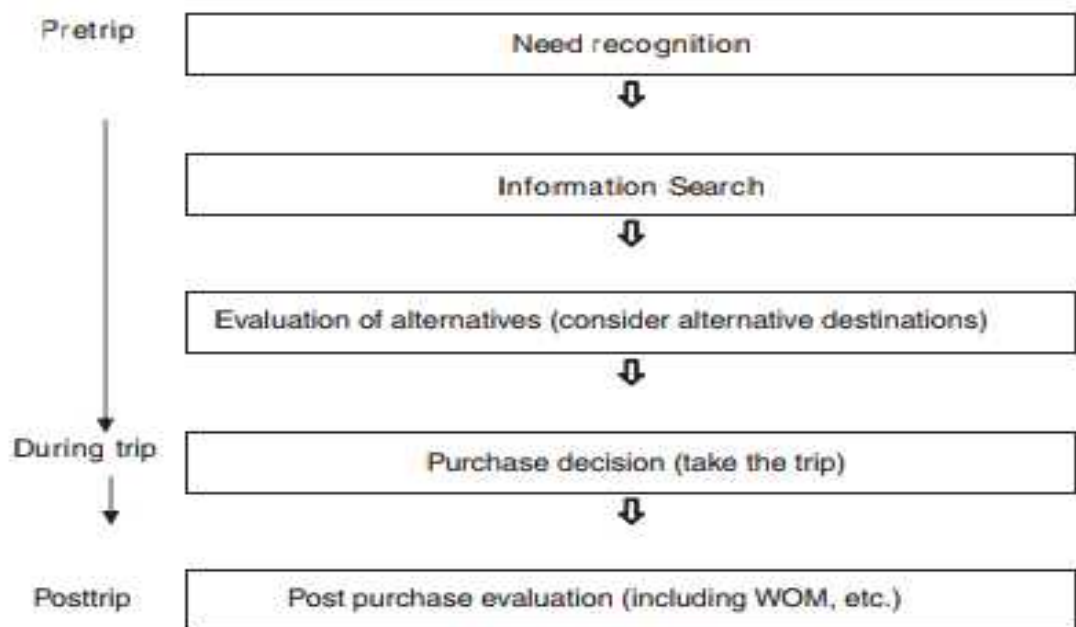


Figure 2.1: The travel planning process. Source: (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Buultjens, 2009)

Travelers are using UGC as an information source for making travel related decisions and a platform for sharing information. Similarly, it is a viable channel for destinations to monitor consumer feedback, and preferences, communicate with current and potential customers and a source for brand co-creation.(Tussyadiah & Zach, 2013). It also provides destination managers with effective ways of positioning their destination and creates value and meaning for future guests. (Woodside et al 2007).

Other than providing other consumers with information from real users of products and services, UGC acts as WOM recommendations (Hyung-Park et al., 2007). Exposure to consumer reviews on social media platforms increases consumers intention of purchasing products and services and maximizes the likelihood that consumers will buy a recommended product (Hyung-Park et al., 2007). Recommendations of products and services by consumers who have a previous experience is important to prospective purchasers when an experiential product (e.g. intangible services such as tourism) is concerned as opposed to a tangible product. (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). The intangible nature of hospitality and travel makes prospective travelers who have never visited a destination embrace information provided by other people through UGC and social networking sites on the Internet (Saranow, 2004; Ricci & Wietsma, 2006).

Credibility of UGC cannot be easily verified by a traveler searching for information online since it is not easy to identify and assess profile of people who post information social media platforms. However, depending on how transparent UGC is, social media sites can have a strong and credible influence on travelers decision-making behavior. (Hyung-Park et al. 2007) note that travelers consider consumer generated reviews as more trustworthy and credible than information provided by tourism businesses offering products and services mainly because travelers who have prior experience to a brand products and services are considered to provide candid information. The major drawback for UGC is that online reviews are passed on by total strangers, resulting in some concern over the credibility of the source of review unlike traditional forms of WOM that come from people who are known to the consumer (i.e. family friends, colleagues, etc.) (Hyung-Park et al., 2007, Litvin et al., 2007).

UGC has faced criticism due to the potential of fake content posted by tourism suppliers posing to be independent customers in order to increase traffic and likes on their social media platforms. This makes the purpose of UGC to influence travellers decision making process meaningless as the content added is no longer independent, objective or credible (Bray & Schetzina, 2006). Social media platforms provide travelers with the opportunity of interacting with each other enhancing online relationships however this cannot be achieved when content is falsified. UGC sites may not necessarily persuade travelers to purchase product or

services but having a brand commented on in these sites has the potential to enhance its reputation.

Ultimately, the power of UGC travel sites in the travel planning process lies in their role as an online source of WOM. Most travelers synthesize UGC with traditional market generated materials and websites to make informed travel decisions. (Beresford Research 2009, Buhalis & Law 2008).

2.6 Summary

This chapter covered the conceptual and theoretical framework. It also reviewed literature on Social media and tourism awareness, Global overview of tourism and social media, Social media and Tourism in Africa, Tourism and social media in Kenya, Social Media Platforms, Social Media Marketing Strategies, User Generated Content and the Impacts of Social Media in Creating Tourism Destination Awareness.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a written or visual presentation that explains either graphically or in narrative form, the variables, the key factors, underlying concepts to be studied and the presumed relationships among them.

In this study, social media platforms, user generated content and social media strategies are three key essential concepts for creating tourism destination awareness.

Social media platforms are channels through which tourism awareness is created on the internet. It has the ability to reach a wide audience. There are different social media platforms for different purposes.

User generated content is vital for destinations in creating tourism awareness. It consists of information posted on various social media platforms by travelers and prospects regarding various brands. It is through this information that visibility of a destination is created online. There is some evidence to suggest that these sites have the power to convert browsers to buyers.

Social media strategies form the framework in which brands operate in when using social media platforms. A good formulated strategy is what makes a brand unique and well positioned in the target market of a destination in order to attract potential travelers and leverage off competitors.

Conceptual Framework

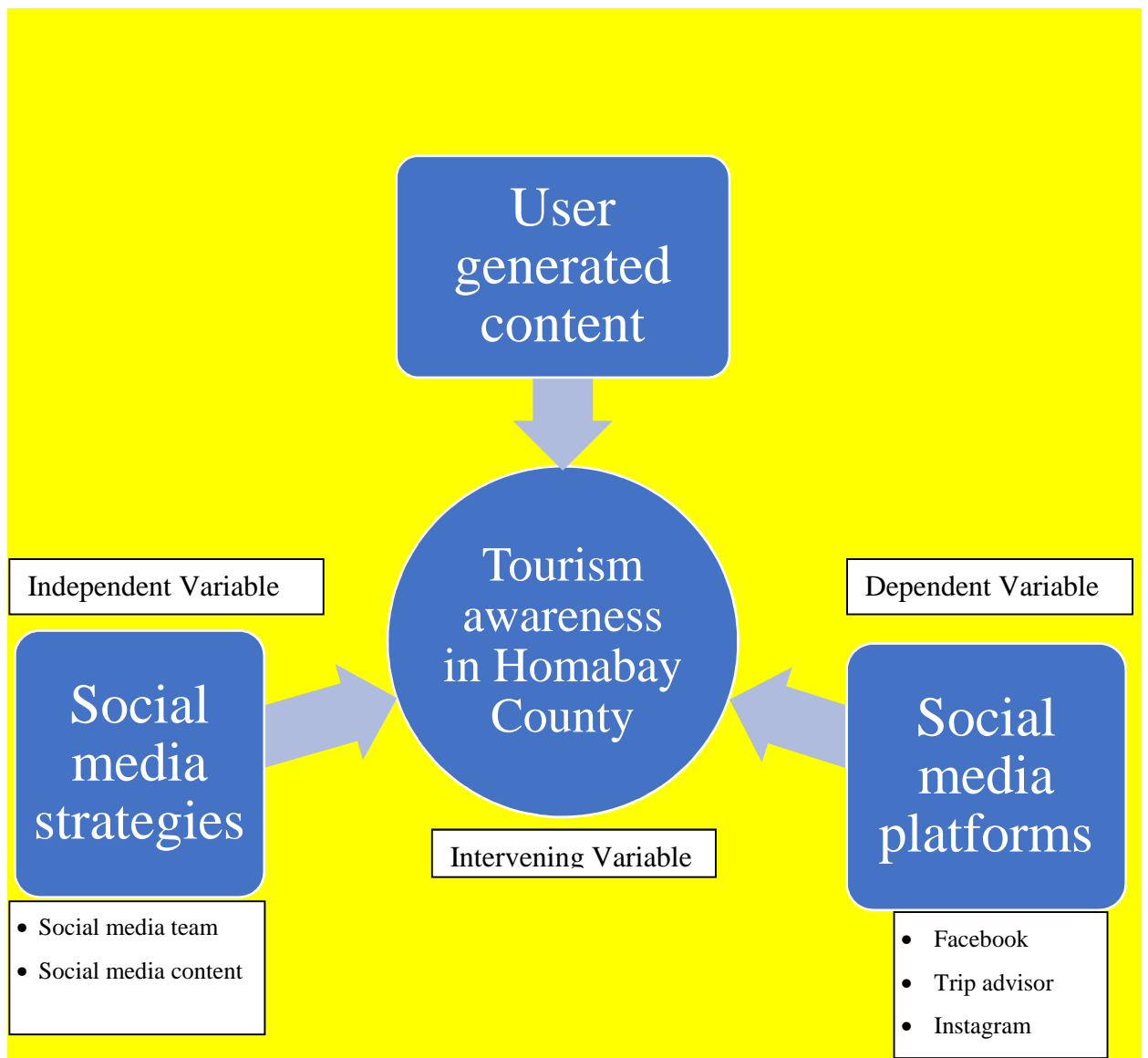


Figure: 2.2 Conceptual Framework Source: Author's compilation (2016)

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focused on methods of research. It presents a description of the selected research design and describes the research strategy and methodology. The chapter describes the research method, research design, study area, target population, sampling procedure, sample size, sampling selection, research instruments, data collection procedures, methods of data analysis, validity and reliability.

3.2 Research design

Research design has been defined as a plan of showing how the problem under investigation was solved (Ngechu, 2001). Based on (Cooper and Schindler, 2003), a research design is a blueprint of fulfilling the objectives and answering the research questions. There are various types of research designs which includes case study, survey, ethnography, grounded theory, experimental research designs among others. The choice of a research design is determined by a number of factors including the scope of the study and the extent to which the researcher can manipulate the data.

This study adopted a case study design. (Robson 2002 pg.178) defines a case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence.” (Yin 2003) refers to case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Similarly, (Gillham 2000) perceives that a case study investigates phenomena by using multiple sources of information from within the immediate context of the case. This study adopted a case study approach as it emphasizes on provision for in-depth information on social media and tourism awareness and also explores ways in which social media, if well exploited by tourism destinations, can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination.

There are salient features that distinguish a case study from other research designs. According to (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011) these features include; data generation. In case studies, generating data usually takes a longer time due to in-depth information that the researcher seeks to find. The researcher, undertook a five-step data collection process while generating data. The researcher began by clarifying data collection goals, this was intended to solve the particular research problem of the study. The researcher then developed operational definitions and procedures, validated the measurement system, collected data while ensuring participants followed the data collection guidelines and continued improving the measurement system as the study proceeded.

(Stake, 2005) explains that while carrying out a case study, a researcher can collect detailed information using triangulation. Triangulation enables the researcher to apply multiple perspective during data collection. It also serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways in which a case is seen. While conducting this study, the researcher used more than one data generation technique; observation, interviews and questioners for obtaining detailed information on how stakeholders in Homabay County use social media for enhancing tourism awareness. The participants were also from various sectors of the tourism industry in Homabay County. They included Ministry of tourism employees, Hotel managers, Tour operators & travel agents, Airlines agents, Hotel employees, KWS personnel and Tourists both domestic and international. This resulted in rich data from the multiple perceptions, experiences, and attitude of the various sets of participants. (Creswell, 2009) points out on the need to use multiple sources of data in order to seek in-depth information. Case studies, extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research.

The context in which a case is to be studied is embedded in a number of other contexts. Tourism being dominantly a service industry is affected by political, economic social and security contexts. These contexts are key to the performance of the tourism industry and therefore favorable conditions need to be put in place to ensure a thriving tourism industry in Homabay County.

Case studies are carried out for various purposes. They can be explanatory, seeking to explain a phenomenon in social life, descriptive, seeking to richly describe a

phenomenon in social life or exploratory, which seeks to investigate an under researched phenomenon of social life. This study was exploratory. Social media being a new form of media is changing a lot of communication aspects in the tourism industry. Similarly, not much is known about tourism in Homabay County and as a result minimal research has been carried out. The study explores ways that social media can positively enhance tourism awareness in Homabay County. The case study research design proved useful for testing whether the psychological ownership theory applies to phenomena in the real world. Indeed, the theory proved to be useful in investigating how social media creates tourism awareness in Homabay County.

3.3 Research method

This study adopted the mixed research method for analysis. Mixed-Method research approach emerged due to conflicts between qualitative and quantitative research approaches to become a widely used research method. The study therefore used a mixed research method to collect quantitative and qualitative data. According to (Creswell, 2012) a mixed research method seeks to build on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative data providing a better understanding of the research problem.

It provided the researcher a variety of choices for a better understanding of the research problem rather than either research approach alone. As a method, it emphasized collecting, analyzing, and mixing qualitative and quantitative data in the study. While conducting the study, the researcher collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data, mixed the two forms of data in different ways and gave priority to both forms of data. The researcher also collected data using different types of research instruments and this proved to be effective in validating the research process.

3.4 Study area

The study took place in Homabay County. It is one of the 47 counties in Kenya established after the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010. The County covers an area of 4,267.1 Km inclusive of the water surface which covers an area of 1,227 km² (2016) and has an inland equatorial type of climate'. (*First County Integrated Development Plan 2013-2017*, 2016).

Based on projections from Kenya Population and Housing Census, the County has an estimated population of 1,038,858 people. ("County Profile", 2016). The County is accessed by Road, water and air transportation.

Respondents were drawn from tourist attractions sites, Hotels, Ministry of tourism, Homabay County, and travel agents all located in Homabay County. Tourists, employees of hotels, tour firms and tourist attractions sites use social media for tourism awareness while the Ministry of Tourism is in charge policy development and all activities related to tourism in the County. The respondents were key in availing relevant information to answer the research questions regarding the topic at hand.

3.5 Target population

A target population in a study is a group of individuals taken from the general population who share a common characteristic, such as age, gender, or working place to form the main focus of a scientific query(Pride, 2005). This group may be studied for different reasons.

The target population consisted of all employees of the Ministry of tourism in Homabay County, hotel managers, tour operators and travel agents, employees of various airlines, Hotel employees, KWS personnel and tourists. The accessible population consisted of all the 20 employees of Ministry of tourism in Homabay County, 16 hotel managers, 8 tour operators and travel agents, 4 employees of airlines, 50 hotel employees, 10 Kenya Wildlife Service personnel and all the tourists who were visiting Homabay County at the time of the study. Tourists were an infinite population since they were visiting Homabay County for various reasons and at different times and a sampling framework could therefore not be established.

The participants of the target population were considered appropriate as population of the study area because they constituted stakeholders responsible for tourism in Homabay County. All of them play a vital role in the tourism industry of Homabay County and therefore were in a better position to furnish the researcher with the information needed to answer the research questions of this study.

Table 3.1 Target Population

S.N	Target Group	Target Population
o		
1.	Ministry of tourism employees	20
2.	Hotel managers	16
3.	Tour operators & travel agents	8
4.	Airlines employees	4
5.	Hotel employees	50
6.	KWS personnel	10
7.	Tourists	242
	Total	50

Source: (Author, 2016)

3.6 Sample size

Sampling entails selecting a number of study units from a definite study population. Out of the participants from the accessible target population, the researcher selected participants that were useful to the study for data collection. The study selected sample size was deemed to produce sufficiently reliable estimates.

The study involved seven categories of participants: Ministry of tourism employees, hotel managers, tour operators & travel agents, airlines employees, hotel employees, Kenya Wildlife Service personnel and Tourists. Tourist attractions and hospitality facilities are spread across the County and therefore, the participants sampled were from various parts of the County.

The study had a total sample of 80 participants as follows; Ministry of tourism employees (4), hotel managers (12), hotel employees (8) Kenya Wildlife Service personnel (2), tour operators & travel agents (4), airlines employees (2), and Tourists (48). The number of participants for the study was small as is inherent with case study This enabled the researcher to obtain various viewpoints and in-depth data from the participants.

Table 3.2: Sample size

S.No	Target Group	Target Population	Sample size
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1.	Ministry of tourism employees	20	4
2.	Hotel managers	16	12
3.	Tour operators & travel agents	8	4
4.	Airlines	4	2
5.	Hotel employees	50	8
6.	KWS personnel	10	2
7.	Tourists	242	48
	Total	350	80

Source: (Author, 2016)

3.7 Sampling technique

The study employed maximum variation or heterogeneous Purposive sampling. It is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher's judgment is relied upon selection of participants with diverse characteristics. The participants of the study included all the key players in the tourism sector of Homabay County. This technique provided much insight on the research questions of the study. It also ensured the presence of maximum variability within the primary data collected. The sample size was thoughtfully and purposefully recruited in order to fully answer the research questions of this study. Maximum variation sampling aided the researcher to identify common themes that were evident across the sample. It also enabled the researcher to focus on particular characteristics of the study population that were of interest to the study hence acquiring in-depth data relevant to the study.

3.8 Type and Sources of Data

The study used both primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected by the researcher using the various techniques of data collection. Primary data is information that a study must gather because no one has compiled and published the information in a forum accessible to the public. Data collected by a party related to the research study is referred to as secondary data. This study used written articles, text books, journals, magazines and online content as secondary sources of data.

3.8.1. Pilot Testing

A pilot study is the pre-testing or 'trying out' of a particular research instrument Mugenda (2003). A pilot test discards all unnecessary, ambiguous or difficult questions and establishes that replies can be interpreted in terms of the information that is required. A pilot test was conducted one month prior to the actual study to field test the reliability and the validity of the instruments using 20 respondents. The respondents included the stakeholders in the tourism industry present in HomaBay County.

3.8.2 Data generation techniques

This study employed the use of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, as the main tools for data collection. The tools were selected based on the source of data, the time available for the study and nature of the data guided by the research questions.

Respondents who participated in the study were key players in the tourism industry of Homabay County from diverse sectors and gave beneficial rich data that informed the study. Proximity to the research sites also made it easier for the researcher to access the research sites before and during the data collection exercise.

3.8.2.1 Interviews

Cohen et al citing (Cancell and Khan (1968, p.527) define interviews as a process that involves gathering data through direct verbal interaction between individuals. The researcher interviewed hotel managers, Warden in charge of Ruma National park, County officer in charge of Tourism and the manager in charge of fly 540 at Homabay Kabunde airstrip and a travel and tour agent in Homabay town. These are stakeholders in charge of various tourism businesses in the County and thus provided vital information on how they utilize social media for tourism awareness on their daily work schedule routine. Through conducting interviews, the researcher got to understand the views of various participants about social media and tourism, reasons for participants to have certain perceptions and the attitude of the participants regarding the phenomenon at hand. It also enabled participants to report their thoughts and experiences thereby giving important insights.(Juan and Ong'ondo, 2011)

This research used semi-structured interviews.(Juan and Ong'ondo, 2011) citing. (Cohen et al.,2007; Richards, 2003; Nunan, 1992) explain that semi-structured interviews allow for deeper exploration of responses by participants through probing and exploring emerging dimensions that may not have been previously considered pertinent aspects of a study. The researcher developed interview schedules that guided the researcher on pertinent issues and also obtain in-depth information on utilization of social media by various tourism stakeholders in Homabay County to create touristic awareness during the interviewing process.

Interviews as a data collection technique are exploratory in nature. It is flexible and allows room for clarification. (Seidman, 2006) Through face to face interviews, the researcher established a rapport with the participants allowing the participants to open up, describe their feelings, intentions and thoughts. In addition to recording, the researcher took elaborate notes to emphasis certain points while the interview was going on.

Face to face interviews were carried out by the researcher at an agreed convenient place for both the participant and the interviewer. English language was used to conduct the interviews. All respondents who participated in the study were conversant with English. English and Swahili are two official languages in Kenya.

Advantages of semi-structured interviews based on Borg(2006 p. 218) includes; it enables the researcher to develop a relationship with the participants ; allows the interview to proceed as a conversation ,Kvale (1996) rather than as a formalized exchange in which the interviewer imposes his or her authority on the interviewee; allows the researcher to explore tacit and observable aspects of participants lives, Glesne and Peshkin, (1992); has the potential to generate data which are more elaborate by relying predominantly on open- ended questions and allows the participant to play an active part in the research rather than being passive objects to be studied. Holstein and Gubrium (1997)

3.8.2.2 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a collection of questions or statements that assesses opinions, beliefs, attitudes, biographical information or other forms of information (Cooper

& Schindler). It is a primary source of data collection. The researcher used a pre-determined, structured set of questions to obtain information from a sample of respondents. Tourists questionnaire were designed to specifically collect information in regards to how tourists utilized various social media platforms prior, during and after visiting tourist attractions and hospitality facilities in Homabay County. The choice of questionnaires for tourists was based on its ability to collect diverse information over a large sample size (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

The questionnaire comprised of two sections consistent with the research questions. Section A comprised of specific information on how tourists utilize social media platforms while section B comprised of information on background characteristics of the tourists. The questionnaires were self-administered by the researcher in a standardized fashion that was similar to all respondents who participated in the study. Questions were formulated in an unambiguous and straightforward manner and presented in a logical order.

The researcher used both open ended and close ended questions a key element in mixed research method. Closed –ended questions required the respondent to choose from among a given set of responses (McIntyre, 1999). The questionnaires were ordered with choices that required the participants to examine possible independent choices out of other choices. Open ended questions allowed the researcher to explore ideas that would not otherwise be aired and were useful where additional insights were sought (Salant & Dillman, 1994).

Major attributes of questionnaires are; economical in terms of time and money, requires less skills to administer, can be administered to a large number of respondents simultaneously, and enables standardization and uniformity (Pizam, 1999). Data are in permanent form ready collected for analysis, and hence can be re-analyzed allowing for reliability checks. (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008)

The questionnaires enabled the researcher to comprehend tourists trends while utilizing social media which was key in answering the first and third research questions.

3.9.1 Validity

Validity is the extent to which a research instrument is able to measure what was intended to measure. (O’leary, 2009) states that validity is based on the assumption

that what is being studied can be measured and captured. It is also viewed as truthfulness and is a measure of how well a conceptualized idea about reality matches the actual reality (Bolarinwa, 2015).

The researcher used content validity to ensure that the instrument measures the required construct (Sangoseni, Hellman & Hill, 2013). They also uphold that for an instrument to achieve content validity it has to undergo a rational analysis by experts who are familiar with the academic scope of study. The researcher therefore sought for suggestions from supervisors and academic experts to ascertain that concepts represented in the research instruments were justified with evidence from literature. Additionally, I also undertook an extensive literature review to identify relevant content areas and ensured that the research instruments items revolved around the research questions.

The researcher also used face validity as a measure of the study validity. (Bolarinwa, 2015) states that it is judgment made based on scientific approach on whether the indicator used measures the required construct. To this end, the researcher presented the research instruments to supervisors and various stakeholders in the tourism industry to assess whether the items were relevant in measuring the study items. The supervisors and key stakeholders in the tourism industry evaluated the appearance of the research instruments in terms of readability, feasibility, clarity of language used and consistency of style and formatting. They confirmed the items on the research instruments albeit with some changes which were implemented.

3.9.2 Dependability (Reliability)

Juan and Ong'ondo (2011 p.141) define dependability as the extent to which a researcher provides sufficient detail and clarity of the research entire process in a way that would make it feasible for a reader to visualize and appreciate and for a researcher to replicate the study if necessary. The idea of reliability in quantitative research is about testing the results, therefore, the most important test in qualitative research would be quality in generating understanding. Precisely, Lincoln & Guba (1985 p. 300) emphasize the use of dependability in qualitative research which

closely corresponds to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research. Yin (2003.) gives reasons for reliability in case study as “to be sure that if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator, the later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions”. Based on these reasons, the goal of reliability therefore is to minimize the errors and biases in a study. To ensure dependability in a case study, clear and detailed descriptions of the steps followed ought to be indicated. (Yin (2003)

To achieve credible and defensible results, the researcher used triangulation. Triangulation is a procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). The researcher used open ended questioners, observation, and recorded interviews for data collection. The instruments enabled the researcher to probe deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Constructivism, views knowledge as socially constructed and may change depending on the circumstances (Golafshani, N. (2003) leading to diverse constructions of realities. This implied that the reality of the interviewees were different/changing thus an indication of multiple or diverse constructions of reality.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, meaning and structure to a collected mass of data. (Marshall and Rossman,1999). (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007) state that it is a practice of ordering and organizing raw data so that useful information can be extracted from it.

The rationale for conducting the mixed analysis based on (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989)identified five purposes for mixing analysis as: (i)complementarity where the results from one analysis are interpreted to illustrate, clarify expand, or enhance findings derived from the other strand (ii)Initiation where the contradictions that might reframe the research question are identified (iii)development where in a study, data are collected sequentially and the findings from one type of analysis are used to inform data collected and analyzed using the other analysis type (iv)expansion where both quantitative and qualitative analyses are used to expand the study's focus and scope and (v) triangulation where the researcher is able to compare qualitative findings to the quantitative results

Data emanating from this study was collected in a systematic way, organized and recorded to enable the reader interpret the information correctly to answer the research questions. The researcher used qualitative and quantitative methods for analyzing data. Quantitative data was analyzed numerically while qualitative data used words (terms, concepts, symbols) to construct a framework for communicating the research findings of this study. Due to the inseparable relationship between data collection and data analysis, the researcher was keen to build a coherent interpretation of data.

(CIRT 2012) provides general procedures for analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher took various steps while analyzing quantitative data. First, the researcher coded the data while assigning them numerical values, then recorded the data in preparation for computer analysis. This was applied to data which was collected through questionnaires. Secondly, the researcher reviewed and explored data. This step helped in looking for trends and distribution of data. When analyzing the data, the researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) software which is user friendly and gave all the possible appropriate analysis for the study. The results from the analyzed data was presented in tables, graphs and figures.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data for this study. Thematic analysis identifies, analyses, and reports themes within data organizing and describing it in rich detail. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). the research followed a procedure based on (Jwan and Ong'ondo 2011) which involves transcribing data; re-familiarizing with data; first phase coding, second phase coding; third phase coding; and producing a report.

The first step entailed organizing data collected from the field. It involved transcribing, translating, data cleaning and labeling the data. This applied to data collected through interviews where video and audio recorded. Data collected through observation was already in written format. This aided the researcher in further reading and understanding of data. The second step identified a framework for the data. The researcher read through the data, identifying a framework guided by the research questions, structuring, labeling and defining data. The researcher also came up with a coding plan for coding the data. The third step involved sorting

data into a framework. Data was coded and grouped into relevant themes. During this phase, the researcher reviewed more literature in order to further develop the emerging themes. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) software was used to analyze the data. The final step of the data analysis involved ranging responses in categories and identifying recurrent themes (Nigatu, 2009). The researcher explained the data, interpreted the sentiments of the participants and related the interview and observation data to give the study the characteristic richness of a qualitative research report. To represent the data, the researcher presented findings in text form and used figures to represent themes.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Ethics are the moral principles that guide research from its inception to its completion and publication of results. (Economic and Research Council, 2005). It includes norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The researcher adhered to various components of ethics during the entire research period. While formulating questions and discussion points for both the questionnaire and interview schedules, the researcher ensured that they were framed in an ethical manner. Before collecting data, the researcher acquired a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and innovation (NACOSTI). The commission is in charge of accrediting research institutes and approves all Scientific research in Kenya.

During data collection, the researcher was nonpartisan in terms of gender, race, and social status. The researcher allowed all participants who were willing to participate in the study and fitted the research context to participate. The researcher also ensured that all participants expressed consent prior to taking part in the research by giving them accurate and detailed information about the research. (Cohen et al, 2000) define informed consent as the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that were likely to influence their decisions

As participants took part in the research, the researcher maximized on the possible benefits of the research while taking measures to ensure they were not exposed to any risks and harm either physical, mental or emotional as a result of their participation in the research. (Gregory, 2003) advises that research should always

be undertaken in a manner that presents minimum risk to both the participants and the researcher.

Information relayed to the researcher by participants was treated with outmost confidentiality. Data regarding research sites and participants remained anonymous and thus was not identified by other persons. However, participants were also informed that owing to the academic nature of research conducted, the information relayed may be published in a journal article, or a book. At all times, the researcher behaved professionally and remained open and honest about the purpose and content of the research.

Data presented in this research based on (Cohen et al, 2000) respects participants right to privacy and sustains the right of society to know about the research. Participants had the right not take part in the research, not to be interviewed nor answer questions that they did not want to. Ultimately, all the sources of knowledge that the researcher reviewed were acknowledged within the work and included in the list of references.

3.12 Summary

This chapter covered the methodology used in this study. It presented a description of the selected research design and described the research strategy and methodology. This chapter begins with introduction and proceeds with the research method, research design, study area, target population, sampling procedure, sample size, sampling selection, research instruments, data collection procedures, methods of and data analysis. validity and reliability and ethical considerations, are also contained in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discussions of data collected based on the objectives and research questions. The main purpose of this study was to explore ways in which social media, if well exploited by tourism destinations, can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination. The study was guided by the following objectives. i). to review the communication media used in creating touristic awareness for Homabay County, ii).to investigate how tourism destinations can exploit social media strategies in creating tourism awareness iii) to examine the salience of user generated content (UGC)in influencing tourists decision making behavior. iv). to identify the factors affecting the use of social media in Homabay County. In addition, the study also examined the characteristics of the participants.

4.2 Demographic Data

This includes the reponse rate, personal information, and types of guests in Homabay County hospitality establishments.

4.2.1 Response rate

The research had a sample population of 80 respondents. During the research, a total of 66 respondents (82%) participated while 14(18%) did not.

4.2.2 Personal information

The researcher sought to find out respondents' personal information based on gender, nationality and age.

4.2.3 Gender of respondents

The data collected included male and female participants. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents were males.

Table 4.1: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	39	59
Female	27	41
Total	66	100

4.2.4 Nationality of respondents

Majority of the tourists were Kenyans. The results confirm that domestic tourists outnumbered international tourists in Homabay County. This illustrates inadequate promotion of the County Globally. This study therefore aims at promoting Homabay County as a tourist destination globally through the use of social media platforms.

4.2.5 Age of respondents

The participants who were engaged in the study were requested to state their age. Age is a key aspect for tourists' segmentation. It enables service providers to know their target market, the likes and dislikes and the spending power of each market segment based on the various age sets.

Table 4.2: Age of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-30 years	16	24
31-40 years	29	44
41-50 years	12	18
Above 50years	9	14
Total	66	100

4.2.6 Types of guests in Homabay County Hospitality establishments

Hospitality service providers, in Homabay County receive different types of guest. The guests vary from tourists visiting for pleasure, corporates, educational institutions, government officials and Non -Governmental Organizations(NGO's). Based on the findings, it was evident that NGO's comprise the largest segment of guests in hospitality establishments. Many NGO's have set up base in Homabay County engaging in HIV/AIDs programme awareness programmes. Homabay County is ranked top as the County with the highest number of HIV infections Countrywide. HIV prevalence in Homabay County is 26.0% 4.5 times higher than the national prevalence (Kenya HIV Estimates 2015).

As one Hotel Manager asserted:

“Tourism in this region depends mostly on conferences. Majority of our guests are from NGO's. A good number of NGO's have set up base in the greater Nyanza region. Most of them get to know about our hotel through word of mouth referrals by other guests who have had a prior experience with us”. (Hotel Manager, 2016)

Table 4.3 Types of Tourists in Homabay County

Types of Tourists	Frequency	Percentage
Educational	7	14
Leisure	8	17
Corporates	4	9
Government	5	10
NGO's	21	43
Others	3	7
Total		100

4.4. Themes of the study

The study focussed on three themes derived from the objectives of the study. They were guided by the research questions which were designed to address the statement of the problem and the objectives.

4.4.1 Social media platforms and tourism awareness in Homabay County.

As technology advances so does communication media. Globally, social media has enhanced communication between customers and service providers acting as a liaison between tourists and the service providers in the tourism industry. However, this research established that majority of tourism and hospitality service providers use both traditional media and social media complementarily for creating tourism awareness.

Yes.....we use a number of communication channels for creating awareness about our hotel. We use posters, flyers, social media, billboards, websites and word of mouth referrals to attract guests. Regarding social media platforms, we are active on facebook. We have a facebook page that is quite active I can say. Other than facebook, we are also present on trip advisor, and booking.com. (Front Office Manager, 2017)

All the tourism and hospitality service providers were active on at least one or more social media platform. Facebook (36%) and trip advisor (43%) were the most utilized social media platforms by tourism and hospitality service providers. Facebook is popular and distinct due to its integrated platform that combines many media and information communication technologies such as web mail, web pages, digital image, digital video, guest book, discussion group, live streaming and search engines. (Fuchs,2017). Trip advisor has an international audience and reviews majority of hospitality and tourist attractions worldwide.

Other social media platforms such as trip advisor, jumia, and booking.com were used as review sites as well as platforms for creating tourism awareness by the service providers.

More service providers in the tourism industry are linking their websites to their social media pages. This enhances the visibility of websites as well as increasing traffic. Based on the findings of this study, 10 (71%) had active websites while 4(29%) had inactive websites. 16% had linked their social media pages to their websites while 84% had not.

Trip advisor allows potential travelers and tourists to review hotels and restaurants, accommodation bookings and other travel-related content. It also facilitates

interactive travel forums. These features made it the most utilized social media platforms by the respondents of this study for planning purposes.

Table 4.4 Utilized social media platforms for planning

Most utilized Social media platform for planning	Frequency	Percentage
Trip advisor	20	42
Booking.com	16	33
Facebook	4	8
Total	48	100

Tourists used various social media platforms depending on the stage they are in the travel planning process – the pre-trip, during the trip and post-trip to minimize the risk of making a poor destination decision. Tourists who were visiting Homabay County used different popular social media platforms including facebook, trip advisor, instagram, booking.com, whatsapp and goggle search engine to search for information regarding their visit.

4.4.2 Social media strategy and tourism awareness in Homabay County.

A social media strategy is essential for guiding service providers who are active on social media platforms. Key aspects of a good social media strategy entail quality content, competent social media team and regular interaction with clients. Tourism and hospitality service providers who took part in this research had a basic framework guiding their online operations but neither had a concrete social media strategy.

The hotel does not have a social media policy to guide daily operations on social media platforms as at now. However, we have contracted a number of marketing firms, jumia and booking.com that does marketing on our behalf. We are also yet to utilize search engine optimization to our advantage but we are exploring on ways to do so. Overall, the hotel manager is in charge of social media operations though, the front office personnel have been tasked with daily operation of our social media

platforms. Generally, the manager supervises and handles issues that are beyond the front office personnel. (Front Office Manager, 2017)

Content is a key aspect of a social media strategy. Good content enhances visibility of service providers on social media platforms. This study sought to investigate the type of content service providers post on their social media platforms, frequency of posting content on their social media platforms and the timeframe of reply to clients.

Service providers who participated in the research indicated that they posted content regarding their products and services on social media platforms. The type of content varied from promoting a new product or service, to promoting products on offer for a duration of time, creating awareness about certain products and services and to highlight certain key events.

From the study, out of the service providers who participated, 29% indicated that they posted content on their social media platforms regularly to update their clients on various engagements and activities while 71% posted content on social media on a need basis. This depended on whether the service provider had vital information to update their clients. Based on these results, the study established that the service providers who posted content on a regular basis had vibrant social media platform(s) compared to those who posted content on a need basis.

Service providers who participated in this study also considered various factors in relation to guest feedback time frame. 14% indicated that they reply to clients instantly, 50% before 24 hours lapses and 36% replied to clients based on the availability of personnel. Instant replies by service providers proved to be more efficient as most clients got instant information and clarification from service providers. More clients are turning to social media as a source for customer service. Positive customer service experiences on social media tend to increase sales and brand recommendations. However, service providers who took long to reply to clients often lost business opportunities.

4.4.3 User generated content and tourism awareness

Tourism service providers stated that they utilize UGC regarding their products. 64% of the participants use it to improve service delivery, while the other 36% get back to their customers.

The researcher also found out that there were no skilled personnel in social media to handle the online activities of tourism and hospitality establishments. Personnel who were mandated to update content on social media platforms doubled up in other positions and included 29% managed by the general manager, 50% personnel from front office in 5 hotels, and 21% by personnel from other departments. The following response illustrates how a hospitality service provider manages its online content and utilizes user generated content.

Usually, we post content on social media platforms when we have information that we want to communicate to the public. When we have posted information on our online platforms, we are always on the lookout to clarify further to our customers when need be. We also engage our customers on online discussions when answering customers inquiries about our hotel. The timeframe for feedback to our customers vary as it depends on the availability of staff who have been mandated to operate our social media platforms.

We use online conversations about our hotel (UGC) to monitor what our guests are saying about us out there, sometimes to listen and solve guests dispute arising from those who were not satisfied with our services or had an issue with service delivery and also to improve our services. (Hotel Manager, 2017).

The researcher also investigated whether guests who visited hospitality establishments or attractions uploaded content or posted photos or videos on social media platforms.

The responses were established as below;

Table 4.4 Social media platforms utilized by tourists for content upload

Social media platform	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	41	62
Whatsapp	12	18
Instagram	8	12

Others	5	8
Total	66	100

From the findings, it was evident that guests post photos and videos of the various tourist attractions and hospitality establishments they visited in Homabay County. Such posting improves the visibility of the service providers in Homabay County as well as act as testimonials. It is also an approach to increase potential guests to Homabay County since the photos and videos are posted by guests who already have a prior experience in Homabay County.

The researcher also found out that user generated content contributes in the decision-making behavior process of guests when they are searching for service providers. The researcher found out that guests search, review and rate service providers before engaging them. From the questioners, 29(69%) respondents stated that UGC plays an important role while they are deciding on a service provider(s) while 13(21%) consider other factors.

4.9 Summary

The data collected has been presented and discussed in this chapter. The has been divided into themes according to the research questions. Presented data shows Response rate,Types of guests in hospitality establishments, types of guests in Homabay County hospitality establishments, communication media used by tourism and hospitality service providers in Homabay County, utilization of social media strategy by tourism and hospitality service providers in Homabay County, role of user generated content in influencing tourists' decision-making behavior, online content by service providers in Homabay County and online content by service providers in Homabay County.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

The findings presented in chapter four were further summarized in this chapter so that specific findings can be obtained clearly in relation to the research objectives. The findings were presented, interpreted and conclusions drawn based on the findings in order to provide answers to the research objectives. Recommendations were made on what should be done in order to increase the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination through social media.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

5.2.1 General information of respondents

The study designed research objectives and research questions with the aim to discuss the issues related to social media and tourism awareness in Homabay County. The study findings of this research have been derived from the laid objectives of the study and the research questions that had attempted to answer. The answers to these questions were provided through the analysis of the data collected as presented in chapter four. The study findings showed the background information of the respondents covered by the study. Nationality, gender, age, work experience and employees responsibilities were good variables used to capture demographic details of the respondents.

It was established that most guests were male 59% compared to their female 41% counterparts. Similarly, most of employees of tourism and hospitality establishments in the county were also male especially at mid and managerial levels. This shows that gender inequality exists and therefore there is the need to empower women.

It was clear from the age distribution of the guests' respondents that majority of them are at their thirties. This means that they are at their prime age, have a source of income and want to explore and seek pleasure.

78% of guests at various hospitality and attraction sites were Kenyan. This implies that domestic tourism drives the tourism industry of Homabay County.

5.2.2 Social media platforms used in creating tourism awareness for Homabay County

57% of tourism and hospitality establishments in Homabay county use social media platforms to create awareness 43% still use traditional media. This confirms that traditional media is still essential for tourism service providers in targeting their clients who as confirmed by the finding are domestic tourists mostly from surrounding communities. NGO's form the largest portfolio of guests for hospitality establishments and from the findings, they are informed through word of mouth referrals However leisure tourists, search for online information regarding an attraction or hospitality establishment before an actual visit.

With technological advances and the emergence of web 2.0, guests and other stakeholders who may utilize traditional media still search for online information regarding tourism and hospitality service providers. This mandates the service providers to be active on social media platforms. From the findings, Trip advisor was the most utilized with 43%, followed by facebook at 36% and other social media platforms at 21%. Out of the service providers that participated, 71% had active websites compared to 29% whose websites were inactive.

Opinions of other travelers were influential in how potential travelers choose destinations to visit. (Greztel &Yoo. 2008; Oconcur , 2008). Generally, travelers tend to search and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision making process in order to minimize the risk of making a poor destination decision. Consumers use different online platforms that serves their travel need as sources of information depending on the stage they are in the travel planning process – the pre-trip, during the trip and post-trip.(Choi et al., 2007)

5.2.3 Social media strategies for creating tourism awareness

Service providers did not have a social media strategy to guide their online operations. Therefore, they did not have social media goals and objectives. Personnel who updated content on social media were not competent enough. There were no social media teams or a division charged with overseeing operations on social media platforms.

Content posted was on a need basis for example when there is an event, or a new product. Lack of expertise on how to handle social media content was as a result of employment of incompetent staff.

5.2.4 User generated content in influencing tourists' decision-making behavior

Guests tend to find UGC as a credible source of information compared to marketing and advertising information by service providers. This is so because UGC also a form of eWOM from guests who have experienced services and products offered by service providers and share their likes and dislikes without bias. They analyze how disgruntled guests complains were solved and how service providers react to UGC. From the findings leisure tourist were prone to accessing UGC in their travel decision making process.

5.3 Conclusions

Communication media plays a vital role in enhancing the visibility of a destination. Without any communication media, it is difficult for service providers in the tourism industry to create awareness to the public about their products and services. The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which social media, if well exploited by tourism destinations, can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination.

Technological advances have led to the emergence of Web 2.0 which allows the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This is the basis foundation of social media. It facilitates a two-way communication between the service provider and the customer, communication between customers and allows for online discussion among various stakeholders. The findings of the study revolved around themes arising from the research questions.

Based on the findings of this study, it was evident that tourism stakeholders in Homabay County use both traditional and new media in complementary for communication. The communication media used include the use of banners, radio, flyers, billboards, word of mouth and social media sites.

It was also clear from the findings that tourism and hospitality service providers in Homabay County did not have a social media strategy to guide their online

operations. There were no skilled personnel/teams in social media to operate their social media platforms. Posting of content and the timing was on a need basis. As a result, there was minimal activity on their social media platforms.

Finally, it was relevant to know how UGC influences tourist decision making process behavior. questionnaire for tourists question four read “Prior to visiting Homabay County, did you review any tourist attraction, tourist or hospitality service provider(s) on any social media platforms before the actual visit?”. From the responses, the researcher concluded that indeed majority of tourists reviewed social media platforms and that UGC plays a vital role in shaping the decision-making process behavior of a tourist.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the above discussions of the major findings of chapter four, the researcher recommended ways that social media can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination.

Tourism and hospitality service providers in Homabay County, should take the opportunity that social media presents and improve their online presence by being active on social media platforms, having active websites, and positioning themselves rightfully to capture their desired target market. Similarly, they also need to improve their physical evidence, services and products in order to attract international tourists.

Tourism and hospitality service providers in Homabay County, should develop and implement social media strategies. This will enable enhancement of communication goals, objectives and employment of qualified personnel to be in charge of social media platforms. This will facilitate social media teams to have the capacity to identify ideal customers on social networks, keep abreast with competitors and categorize primary and secondary social media platforms according to traffic.

Employees of the various tourism establishments in Homabay County should be trained to be familiar with online related processes so as to improve service delivery

and quality services, enhance customer satisfaction and improve communication processes in order to achieve operational efficiency of the establishments

The researcher also recommended that the County government of Homabay should step up its efforts in creating policies that will improve the tourism industry, create a conducive environment for tourism businesses to operate, improve infrastructure key in enhancing operations of the various stakeholders and lobby investors to invest in the industry.

Finally, gender inequality and representation which is experienced in various tourism and hospitality establishments need to be dealt with by ensuring there is equal recruitment of both genders especially at managerial levels and also promote women empowerment.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOURISTS

Questionnaire number _____

Date _____

My name is Rose Achieng a student at Rongo University undertaking a Masters degree in Communication Studies. I am carrying out a research study titled ***Social Media and Tourism Awareness: A case of Homabay County***. The study seeks to establish the importance of social media utilization in Homabay County as a tourist destination. The questionnaire is meant to aid in data collection for this study. Kindly assist in the filling of the questionnaire to help in successful completion of the study. All the information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will be used for the purpose of this research only.

Instructions

- a. *Please read each item carefully before answering them.*
- b. *All information given will be treated with confidence*

Section A: Specific Information

1. Have you heard of any tourist attraction site in Homabay County?

Yes () No ()

2. If yes, from which social network platform. Please tick appropriately

Facebook []

Trip advisor []

Twitter []

Instagram []

(Other) _____ Please
indicate.....

3. Apart from social media, is there any other media that informed you about tourism in Homabay County?

Please
indicate.....
.....

4. What is the purpose of your visit? Please tick as appropriate.

[] Leisure

- ☐ Business
- ☐ Corporate
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Other

(Please specify)

5. Were you referred to this destination by a tourist who had previously visited Homabay County?

Yes ☐ No ☐

6. Do you use social media? (please select all that apply)

- ☐ before a trip to get information about a destination
- ☐ before a trip to get other people's opinion about a destination
- ☐ during your trip to share information and/or opinion about destination Homabay with friends/family
- ☐ during your trip to share information, pictures, or videos with friends/family
- ☐ after your trip to share information and/or opinion about destination Homabay with friends/family

7. Which top three (3) social media sites do you use most when planning your vacation?

8. Prior to visiting Homabay County, did you review any tourist attraction, tourist or hospitality service provider(s) on any social media platforms before the actual visit? Please tick the social media platform(s) that you used.

Facebook ☐

Trip advisor ☐

Twitter ☐

Instagram ☐

(Other) Please
indicate.....

9. Prior to your visit, did you engage with the host attraction/ hospitality facility on any social media platform?

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. On a scale of 1- 5, please rate your response satisfaction level by the host attraction/ hospitality facility.

Fully satisfied 1[] 2[] 3[] 4[] 5[] Not satisfied

11. What was the time frame for their response? Please tick as appropriate

[] Within an hour

[] Within 12 hours

[] Within 24 hours

[] More than 24hours

Please specify

12. During your trip, have you posted or uploaded any photo or video on any social media platform?

Yes [] No []

b. If yes, please indicate on which social media platform(s)

Facebook []

Whatsup []

Twitter []

Instagram []

(Other) Please indicate.....

13. Would you recommend Homabay as a tourism destination on any social media platform?

Yes [] No []

b.If yes, please state the social media platform(s) that you would recommend on

Facebook []

Whatsup []

Twitter []

Instagram []

(Other) Please indicate.....

14. What role does social media play in influencing your choice destination?

Section B: General Information

Please tick where applicable

1. Nationality

2. Indicate your gender: male [] Female []

3. Indicate your age
- a) 18 – 30 years [☐]
 - b) 30 – 40 years [☐]
 - c) 40 – 50 years [☐]
 - d) Above 50 years [☐]

Thank you for taking time to participate in this research

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HOTEL MANAGERS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and contributing to my research study of which the overall aim of the study is to explore ways in which social media can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination. All information will be strictly confidential. This interview will be divided in four sections, under the following headings: Background, Communication media, Social media strategy and Content.

A. Social media

1. Which communication media do you use?
2. Are you active on any social media platform?
3. If yes, which social media platforms are you active on?

B. Social media strategy

4. Do you have a social media policy/ framework on which the hotel operates?
5. Who is in charge of social media in the hotel?
6. Do you have a social media team?
7. How do you utilize search engines optimization to your advantage?

C. User Generated Content

8. How often do you post content on your social media platforms?
9. Do you engage in online discussions with your clients?
10. What is the time frame for your reply to questions from clients?
11. How do you use user generated content to your advantage?
12. Is your website linked to any social media platform?

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE TOUR AND TRAVEL AGENTS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and contributing to my research study of which the overall aim of the study is to explore ways in which social media can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination. All information will be strictly confidential. This interview will be divided in four sections, under the following headings: Background, Communication media, Social media strategy and Content.

A. Communication media

1. Which communication media do you use?
2. Are you active on any social media platform?
3. If yes, which social media platforms are you active on?

B. Social media strategy

4. Do you have a social media policy/ framework on which the tour firm operates?
5. Who is in charge of social media in the hotel?
6. Do you have a social media team?
7. How do you utilize search engines optimization to your advantage?
8. Do you have any designed tourist package(s)?

C. User Generated Content

9. How often do you post content on your social media platforms?
10. Do you engage in online discussions with your clients?
11. What is the time frame for your reply to questions from clients?
12. How do you use user generated content to your advantage?
13. Is your website linked to any social media platform?

APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TOURISM COUNTY OFFICER

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and contributing to my research study of which the overall aim of the study is to explore ways in which social media can positively contribute to a destination communication goals as well as enhance the visibility of Homabay County as a tourist destination. All information will be strictly confidential. This interview will be divided in three sections, under the following headings: Background, Policy, and Strategy

A. Social Media

1. Do you have a social media policy/ framework for tourism operations in the County?
2. What measures have you put in place to utilize social media to enhance tourism in Homabay County

B. Social media Strategy

3. Who is in charge of social media in the County?
4. Do you have a social media team?
5. Have you had any tourism forums for the County in which social media were a subject?
6. Has there been growth on tourism arrivals since the establishment of devolved system of governance?
7. Do you have any designed tourist package(s)?
8. Is there any technological infrastructure to enhance communication in the County?

APPENDIX VII: APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH PERMIT



OFFICE OF THE DEAN

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Tel. 0771349741

P.O. Box 103 - 40404
RONGO

Our Ref: **IC/PGC/1004/2013**

Date: Wednesday, April 26, 2017

The Chief Executive Officer,
National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation,
Utalii House,
Off Uhuru Highway, Nairobi,
P.O Box 30623-00100,
Nairobi-KENYA.

Dear Sir,


**RE: RESEARCH PERMIT FOR MS. ROSE ACHIENG' AGALO-
IC/PGC/1004/2013**

We wish to inform you that the above person is a bona fide graduate student of Rongo University in the School of Information, Communication, & Media Studies pursuing a Masters degree in Communication Studies. She has been authorized by the University to undertake research titled; "***Social Media and Tourism Awareness. A Case of Homa-Bay County, Kenya***"

This is, therefore, to request the commission to issue her with a research permit to enable her proceed for field work.

Your assistance to her shall be highly appreciated.

Thank you.


Prof. Hezborn Koderu
DEAN, SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Copy to: Ag. Vice Chancellor
Ag. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic and Student Affairs).
Dean, School of Information, Communication & Media Studies.
HoD, Communication, Journalism & Media Studies.



APPENDIX VIII: NACOSTI RESEARCH PERMIT

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
MISS. ROSE ACHIENG AGALO
of RONGO UNIVERSITY , 0-30100
Eldoret, has been permitted to conduct
research in Homabay County


on the topic: SOCIAL MEDIA AND
TOURISM AWARENESS: A CASE OF
HOMABAY COUNTY, KENYA

for the period ending:
10th May, 2018

Applicant's Signature

Permit No : NACOSTI/P/17/80088/17129
Date Of Issue : 10th May, 2017
Fee Received :Ksh 1000.

Director General
National Commission for Science,
Technology & Innovation



CONDITIONS

1. You must report to the County Commissioner and the County Education Officer of the area before embarking on your research. Failure to do that may lead to the cancellation of your permit.
2. Government Officer will not be interviewed without prior appointment.
3. No questionnaire will be used unless it has been approved.
4. Excavation, filming and collection of biological specimens are subject to further permission from the relevant Government Ministries.
5. You are required to submit at least two (2) hard copies and one (1) soft copy of your final report.
6. The Government of Kenya reserves the right to modify the conditions of this permit including its cancellation without notice.

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NACOSTI

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

RESEARCH CLEARANCE PERMIT

Serial No. A 14074

CONDITIONS: see back page

APPENDIX IV: HOMABAY COUNTY MAP

